United Nations E/AC.51/2002/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 April 2002

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-second session
10 June-5 July 2002
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-ninth session on the in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme

Note by the Secretary-General**

In conformity with General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-ninth session on the in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme. The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and offices. The Secretary-General takes note of the findings of the report and concurs with its recommendations.

* E/AC.51/2002/1.

** The present report was submitted late owing to extensive consultations required by the in-depth evaluations on this year's schedule.

02-35620 (E) 220502

Annex

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-ninth session on the in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on an in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme.

The Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, the entity implementing the electoral assistance programme, has achieved significant progress in following through on a number of CPC recommendations. Regarding the need to update the guidelines to Member States seeking electoral assistance, a note of guidance was circulated to all UNDP field offices and included in the report of the Secretary-General on enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections (A/56/344). There was good progress in establishing an electoral assistance network, as the Division entered into a number of agreements and partnerships with intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations active in the field of electoral assistance. It is expected that these agreements will facilitate the sharing and exchange of information. In response to the recommendation that it should coordinate and facilitate lessons learned from electoral assistance, the Division took a number of steps, including conducting an in-depth assessment of a major mission and a risk analysis study based on past electoral missions.

The Division, however, did not sufficiently promote the exchange of information through the print media or the Internet among the various electoral assistance networks and partnerships of which it is a member. There was insufficient participation on the part of other departments and organizations of the United Nations system in lessons-learned exercises on electoral assistance organized by the Division. The recommendation on allocating responsibilities among the Division and other entities within the United Nations system in order to achieve a more integrated response has not been fully implemented and progress should continue under the Division's auspices. There was limited implementation of the recommendations concerning gender mainstreaming in the activities of the Division and the need for the Division to solicit extrabudgetary funds.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–2	4
II.	Findings	3–22	4
	A. Recommendation 1: Guidelines to Member States seeking electoral assistance	3–5	4
	B. Recommendation 2: Orientation and responsibilities of the Electoral Assistance Division/Department of Political Affairs	6–19	5
	C. Recommendation 3: Allocation of responsibilities within the United Nations	20–22	8
III.	Conclusions and recommendations	23–24	9

I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-ninth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the in-depth evaluation of the electoral assistance programme (E/AC.51/1999/3). The Committee endorsed recommendations 1 and 3 contained in the report, on the understanding that they would be implemented in accordance with the relevant provisions of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 (A/55/6/Rev.1). The Committee also endorsed recommendations 2 (a) to (d), (f) and (g) on the understanding that, regarding recommendation 2 (d), lessons learned from democratization activities would be included only to the extent that those activities enjoyed mandates and regarding recommendation 2 (g), overreliance on extrabudgetary funds should be avoided to the extent possible.

2. Programme of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, subprogramme 2: Electoral assistance, states that the General Assembly has encouraged the Secretary-General to respond to the evolving nature of requests for assistance and the growing need for specific types of medium-term expert assistance aimed at supporting and strengthening the existing capacity of requesting Governments, in particular through enhancing the capacity of national electoral institutions. The strategy for implementation includes provision of technical advice, upon request by Member States, on the democratization process, electoral laws, election organization and administration, as well as strengthening national electoral institutions, preparing guidelines and training materials, undertaking needs assessments, formulating projects and establishing partnerships with intergovernmental expert bodies, regional associations of electoral bodies, regional organizations and organizations of the United Nations system to ensure more comprehensive and needs-specific responses to requests for electoral assistance (A/55/6/Rev.1, para. 1.10).

II. Findings

A. Recommendation 1 Guidelines to Member States seeking electoral assistance

3. "Revised guidelines, fully reflecting the broader and longer-term mandates given to the Secretariat over the last few years, including post-election assistance to contribute to the sustainability of electoral processes, gender perspective mainstreaming and the lessons of best practice learned from recent experience with electoral assistance, should be annexed, for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, to the report of the Secretary-General requested in Assembly resolution 52/129."

A note of guidance for the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on electoral assistance, specifying the respective roles and responsibilities of the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP, was signed by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and the Administrator of UNDP in January 2001. Soon afterwards, this note was transmitted to all UNDP resident coordinators in order to ensure their understanding and ability to advise interested Governments appropriately. Subsequently, the note was included in annex II to the report of the Secretary-General on enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections (A/56/344). Following consideration of the note of guidance by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, a note verbale was sent by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs to all Member States on 31 January 2002 stating the requirements for the provision of electoral assistance to Member States. The Department of Political Affairs web site also contains updated information on the criteria and requirements for providing electoral assistance by the United Nations.

4. The note of guidance refers to the following criteria and factors that are considered by the Electoral Assistance Division when it conducts a needs assessment mission on how to respond to a request for assistance:

(a) Sufficient lead time (four months or more);

(b) The political, material and institutional situation in the requesting country;

(c) The appropriateness, necessity and potential impact of United Nations assistance;

(d) Whether the main contesting political parties and representatives of the civil society support United Nations involvement.

The Division has also issued to all Member States a brochure describing its mandate and the various types

of assistance it provides to them. OIOS was informed that the compilation and analysis of lessons learned, as requested in recommendation 1, were addressed to a different audience — international observers — and included in training materials and manuals (see para. 15 (v) below).

5. The Electoral Assistance Division has made significant progress in implementing recommendation 1.

B. Recommendation 2
Orientation and responsibilities of the Electoral Assistance Division/ Department of Political Affairs

6. "The Electoral Assistance Division/Department of Political Affairs should concentrate its work on:

"(a) The *needs assessment* stage of responding to requests for electoral assistance, being more proactive in anticipating such requests, and the subsequent discussions with Governments leading to agreement on the nature of assistance to be provided and the assignment of primary responsibility for each assistance project to the appropriate United Nations Organization. In general, subsequent activity by the Division/Department should be restricted to guidance on the political aspects of any problems that might arise and coordination."

The role of the Division in conducting needs assessment missions was elaborated in the note of guidance, which states that before the United Nations system can provide any type of electoral assistance, directly or on behalf of a third party, the Organization must first carefully assess the pre-electoral conditions in the requesting country. It is essential to undertake such an assessment prior to any type of project commitment in order to ensure involvement only in settings in which legitimate elections are likely to be carried out. An accurate and adequate assessment of the pre-electoral environment in countries seeking assistance will reduce the risk of associating the United Nations with elections whose organization and conduct do not adhere to internationally recognized criteria. The note of guidance also describes procedures to be followed by Governments in submitting their requests for electoral assistance (see A/56/344, annex II, para. 5).

7. OIOS was informed that in its effort to be more proactive in anticipating electoral assistance requests, the Division took the following actions: (a) it regularly informed UNDP that elections were forthcoming, based on an electoral calendar containing information on elections in all countries; and (b) it sent expert advisory service missions, which were usually small, low-profile missions intended to provide early assessment and expert advice on coordination and operations of electoral assistance projects prior to a formal request by Governments (see ibid., para. 5 (d)). During the biennium 2000-2001, the Division received 46 requests for assistance and conducted 32 needs assessment missions.

8. There are some differences of views on the role of the Division once approval is given by the focal point (the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs) for a particular electoral assistance project. An internal study of risk assessment conducted by the Electoral Assistance Division recognizes that while the Division's role diminishes after a project's assessment, it does not end completely, as the Division is still responsible for monitoring the project in order to minimize the risk to the Organization. The Division also refers to the note of guidance, which states that in case of a positive decision for electoral assistance by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Division will work in close collaboration with UNDP in preparing an appropriate electoral assistance project (see ibid., para. 5 (e)). However, UNDP refers to paragraph 5 (e) of the note of guidance, which states that once drafted and reviewed by UNDP and the Division, the approval and implementation of a technical electoral assistance project is governed by the normal procedures laid out in the programme manual of UNDP, as the basis for its position that, at that juncture, the Division's role should be limited to providing advice. Both partners are continuing discussions on defining their respective roles and responsibilities for subsequent phases of electoral projects.

9. The Electoral Assistance Division has implemented recommendation 2 (a) in a purposeful way and is engaged in discussions with UNDP to define the Division's role during subsequent phases of electoral assistance.

10. "The Electoral Assistance Division/Department of Political Affairs should concentrate its work on:

"(b) The re-establishment and development of *an electoral assistance network* of governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental

organizations active in electoral assistance, and the facilitation of timely exchange of information among members by means of a web site and the convening of periodic meetings of the network."

In paragraphs 29 to 31 of the in-depth evaluation, it is noted that, following a conference on the coordination of international assistance in the electoral field in October 1992, the participants approved the establishment, under the auspices of the Electoral Assistance Division, of an electoral assistance information network. The Division was designated the focal point for voluntary information sharing and networking with participants, which include States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. However, as of mid-1994, the network was no longer active. It was concluded in the in-depth evaluation that it would be useful for the Division to re-establish this electoral assistance network.

11. In response to OIOS follow-up at the end of 2001, the Electoral Assistance Division reported that it had implemented the foregoing recommendation through a strategy designed to rationalize inter-agency relationships through memorandums of understanding and agreements, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the various organizations. OIOS confirmed that several partnership agreements had been developed during the past three years. In April 1999, the Partnership for Electoral and Democratic Development was created. Through a letter of intent, the signatories — the Electoral Assistance Division, Elections Canada, the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico, the International Foundation for Election Systems and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) — agreed to identify and implement joint projects. In June 2000, another agreement was reached between the Division and the European Union on regular information sharing on issues of mutual interest (see A/56/344, para. 20). In November 2000, the Division signed a separate memorandum of understanding with IDEA that provided a framework for further collaboration in research, technical meetings and fieldwork (see ibid., para. 22). In November 2001, a cooperation agreement was signed with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs providing for joint actions and consultations between the Division and the Institute, cooperation in dissemination of their official publications and information sharing on priority areas of activities. In the context of a meeting sponsored by the Government of Botswana, IDEA and the Southern African Development Community, the Division expanded its network of partnerships with key electoral authorities in the region. The tasks of coordinating international observers continued to be referred by the United Nations to regional organizations that serve as the lead agencies. Consultation mechanisms were developed to further the collaboration between the Division and the regional organizations. For example, a meeting between a senior Division staff member and representatives of the Organization of African Unity, held in Addis Ababa, resulted in an informal agreement to cooperate more closely on the provision of technical assistance in the field and on the composition and organization of international observer missions. The evaluator observed that the Division had not used the print media or the Internet, as was requested in recommendation 2 (b), to promote the exchange of information among the various electoral networks and partnerships in which the Division participates.

12. Recommendation 2 (b) was implemented partially through the establishment of separate, ad hoc agreements with various intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations, but without putting a priority on the exchange of information among the various networks and partnerships.

13. "The Electoral Assistance Division/Department of Political Affairs should concentrate its work on:

"(c) Contributions to *intergovernmental political debate* on (i) enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization, (ii) respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and (iii) support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies."

The Electoral Assistance Division has continued to contribute to the debate in the General Assembly on human rights questions, on enhancing the effectiveness of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization by issuing two reports, A/54/491 and A/56/344. In its resolution 56/154 on respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in electoral processes, the General Assembly for the first time recognized the United Nations contribution of electoral assistance to numerous States upon their request. While responsibility for providing support to the yearly debate on the efforts of

Governments to promote and consolidate new and restored democracies lies with the Policy Planning Unit within the Department of Political Affairs, the Division has provided background and assessments of electoral assistance for the reports of the Secretary-General on this matter (A/54/492, A/55/489 and A/56/499).

14. The Electoral Assistance Division has implemented recommendation 2 (c) in a meaningful manner.

15. "The Electoral Assistance Division should concentrate its work on:

"(d) Coordination and facilitation of *lessons learned* from electoral assistance and democratization activities, including the development of systematic and shared procedures, and the formulation and revision of handbooks, guidelines and codes of good practice."

The Electoral Assistance Division reported that it had implemented recommendation 2 (d) through the following actions:

(i) The development of terms of reference for end-of-mission reports to assist in assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of Division assistance, results obtained, impact achieved and sustainability of the programme during the period;

(ii) One in-depth lessons-learned exercise. The purpose of such an exercise is to organize and formulate recommendations to enhance the performance of future electoral missions;

(iii) An analysis of risk assessment of certain electoral assistance programmes of the United Nations. An internal study identifying several threats and risks arising from within the Organization itself and from external sources and actors was completed in February 2002;

(iv) The development of common norms and procedures through participation in international meetings and conferences in the field of democratization. OIOS confirmed that participation occurred in the following meetings: (a) a meeting held by the Organisation internationale de la francophonie in 2000 to exchange experiences on the theme of electoral observations and discuss criteria, institutional frameworks and mechanisms to support electoral assistance in various countries; (b) a conference on the role of human rights and democratization in conflict prevention and resolution, organized by the Commission of the European Union with the support of IDEA, held in Brussels in 2001; and (c) a conference on ensuring the integrity of international monitoring through mutually recognized standards and methodologies, co-sponsored by the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy/Organization of American States and the National Democratic Institute, held in Washington, D.C., in February 2002. Division staff also participated in several international meetings to discuss plans for a potential Internet portal for electoral research, policy alternatives for the use of computer technologies in elections and research on and development of international standards for the use of new technologies in elections.

(v) The development of a training material for international observers and United Nations staff. In 2000, the Division developed a CD-ROM on international observation to serve as a practical and theoretical guide for people and organizations observing the election process in a given country, which was disseminated to all Member States. In June 2001, the training material was used for a training workshop on electoral assistance designed for staff of the Organization, including UNDP, to improve their understanding of the activities of the United Nations system in the electoral field and about the electoral process in general. The training material incorporated end-of-mission reports from 1993 to 2000, illustrating various types of missions conducted by the Division.

16. *While the Electoral Assistance Division has made meaningful progress in implementing recommendation 2 (d), greater participation of relevant United Nations organizations, such as UNDP, in lessons learned exercises is desirable.*

17. "The Electoral Assistance Division/Department of Political Affairs should concentrate its work on:

"(f) The mainstreaming of *gender issues* in all of the above activities."

The mission reports and other documents reviewed by OIOS did not indicate a gender-mainstreaming dimension or include a separate item or chapter on women and elections. OIOS was informed that there was a plan to prepare a booklet on women and elections in 2001, but the project was postponed until further notice. *The Electoral Assistance Division stated to OIOS that they have included more female*

consultants in the Division roster and ensured greater participation of female staff in their missions. To the extent possible, in technical assistance projects, the Division has included a civic education component aimed specifically at women voters.

18. "The Electoral Assistance Division/Department of Political Affairs should concentrate its work on:

"(g) Actively soliciting *extrabudgetary funds*, perhaps through an annual pledging meeting in cooperation with UNDP, for the electoral assistance trust fund, and annual reporting on activities and expenditures to donors."

OIOS was informed that, in response to recommendations made by the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, the core resources of the Electoral Assistance Division had increased by two posts. The Division, which relies largely on voluntary contributions to its Trust Fund for Electoral Observation to finance its activities, reported that by the end of 2001 the non-earmarked funds in the Trust Fund would be almost totally depleted and that that state of affairs might result in the Division being forced to decline assistance, owing to a lack of sufficient funds. The Division also stated that its resource mobilization efforts for the Trust Fund had been constrained by the limited staff resources that could be devoted to those tasks (see A/56/344, paras. 57 and 58). Those efforts consisted of the organization by the Division of three briefings of donors and Member States on Division activities for the purpose of creating awareness of those activities and to encourage contributions to the Trust Fund. *Regarding the organization of a pledging conference, the Electoral Assistance Division stated to OIOS that a large number of Member States consulted had not found that such a conference would be advisable.* The Division stated that there was no organized joint pledging conference with UNDP, as the use of funds in UNDP should be country and project specific.

19. As a result of the efforts reported in paragraph 18 above, approximately US$ 900,000 were contributed to the Trust Fund for Electoral Observation during the period, most of which is earmarked for specific electoral missions. While OIOS considers that there was limited progress in implementing recommendation 2 (g), it is noted that, in response to recommendations of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, the Division's core resources were increased by two posts in 2001.

C. Recommendation 3
Allocation of responsibilities within the United Nations

20. "The Departments of Political Affairs, Peacekeeping Operations and Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP, the Office for Project Services and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should reach an agreement by the end of 1999 on the allocation of responsibilities for an integrated response of the United Nations system to requests for assistance with electoral processes, as broadly conceived by General Assembly mandates. This agreement should cover procedures for handling requests by Member States; the maintenance of United Nations rosters and databases, the periodic training of United Nations officials, including resident representatives, and other elements of institutional preparedness and memory; and lessons learned procedures and fund-raising for electoral activities."

The Division's approach to implementing recommendation 3 differed from the integrated approach recommended by OIOS. The Division sought to develop cooperative relationships with those agencies through separate agreements on an ad hoc basis. As was mentioned in paragraph 3 above, it issued a note of guidance with UNDP that highlighted the respective responsibilities of the Division and UNDP. It also prepared a draft agreement for provision of certain inputs and services by the United Nations Office for Project Services and a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Volunteers programme. It has agreed on an informal working arrangement to coordinate its activities with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. OIOS was informed that it maintains continuing liaison with officers of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations noted that there was no need for an agreement with the Division, as the division of responsibilities was sufficiently clear and transparent on the operational side, noting that if such an agreement were prepared, it should be cast in general terms and be flexible enough to adapt to the unique circumstances of each electoral assistance mission.

21. The Division's approach of developing separate arrangements with different partners in the United Nations system was probably more feasible and practical than preparing one comprehensive agreement with all the relevant agencies of the system. This approach was also

based on the recognition that building a common ground and common understanding of issues of procedures with its major partner — UNDP — was a first priority. It should be noted however that, while circulating the note of guidance has been helpful in clarifying the respective responsibilities of both the Division and UNDP in the field, it has not eliminated the need to improve the exchange of information on plans and ongoing activities between the two partners at Headquarters and in the field and to further clarify their different roles in the note of guidance. The Division reported that there were still instances when the note of guidance was not followed in the field, which were not immediately reported to the Division. There are also cases where the Division's decisions and actions were perceived by UNDP as overreaching the Division's mandate and authority. UNDP has also expressed an interest in having access to the Division's roster of electoral experts and for greater transparency in the criteria used for selecting electoral experts for the roster. *The Electoral Assistance Division stated to OIOS that the physical sharing of the roster was not possible currently and that UNDP had not been able to guarantee that it would not share it with third parties. In this regard, the Division needs to maintain confidentiality of the personal information submitted by electoral experts.* OIOS was informed that the Division had plans to computerize and maintain a competency-based electoral roster for the entire United Nations system during the biennium 2002-2003.

22. There was significant progress in implementing recommendation 3.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

23. Overall, there was significant progress in implementing the recommendations approved by the Committee for Programme and Coordination in 1999. Several steps were taken towards revising the guidelines to Member States seeking electoral assistance. The Electoral Assistance Division followed through on the recommendation identifying the areas where it should focus its efforts by (a) revising guidelines and procedures pertaining to the needs assessment stage of responding to requests for electoral assistance, (b) developing electoral assistance networks and partnerships, and (c) contributing to the intergovernmental debate in the General Assembly in a meaningful way. However, more efforts are needed for coordinating and facilitating lessons learned from electoral assistance. There was insufficient progress in implementing gender mainstreaming in all the activities of the Division and limited efforts in soliciting extrabudgetary funds. While there has been significant progress in allocating responsibilities between the Division and the other relevant entities of the United Nations in consultation with those entities, as requested in recommendation 3, the review identified some problems in the implementation of that recommendation. The Division and UNDP have been engaged in discussions to strengthen coordination of their activities and to achieve a better flow of information from the field. This process of allocation of responsibilities for electoral assistance should continue under the initiative of the Division.

24. Based on the findings of the present review, OIOS makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The Electoral Assistance Division should promote the exchange of information among the various networks and partnerships it has established through the use of the print media and the Internet.

Recommendation 2

The Electoral Assistance Division should continue the process of reaching agreements with other relevant departments and organizations of the United Nations system on their respective allocation of responsibilities in order to achieve a more coordinated response to electoral assistance requests. The Division should coordinate lessons learned from electoral assistance exercises with the above entities.

Recommendation 3

The Electoral Assistance Division should mainstream gender issues in all its activities, particularly in its needs assessment mission reports, in analysing the needs of women in the electorate, training manuals and evaluation and assessment exercises.

(*Signed*) Dileep Nair
Under-Secretary-General for
Internal Oversight Services